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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND NGO LEADERS DISCUSS TIP

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2686

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2765

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador Mulford met New Delhi's leading NGOs and UN Agencies that work on trafficking in persons (TIP) and bonded labor on June 14 to solicit their reaction to the TIP Report and Action Plan and ask for their frank assessments of the TIP situation in India. Largely thanks to previous TIP reports, the near unanimous consensus was the GOI was demonstrating greater sensitivity to TIP and the situation in India has improved, not worsened, during the last three years. However, significant problems remain at the grassroots level and TIP efforts are uneven across the country. Many NGOs agreed that six months would be insufficient to demonstrate results and downgrading to Tier 3 would be seen as unfair and unhelpful to continuing their anti-TIP efforts. Some NGOs, on the other hand, felt the "shock treatment" of a downgrade, while unpopular with the GOI, might have benefits. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador opened the meeting by underscoring the importance of the TIP report and describing the special assessment period. As reflected in the media (reftel A), the Ambassador acknowledged that the USG reached its decision to keep India on the Tier 2 Watch List after significant debate within the Department of State. Although the USG has never been a "single-issue" government and our broad relationship with India is multi-faceted, he pressed that the USG and India share common values and both countries want to end modern day slavery.

NGO General Assessment: GOI's Anti-TIP Efforts Are Better,
Not Worse

[1](#)3. (SBU) Almost all NGO representatives noted a marked change in the GOI's anti-trafficking efforts. Senior police officer and founder of the Prayas Institution of Juvenile Justice Amod Kanth said, "As a police officer and a volunteer organization, things have definitely improved during the last three years. I have noticed that the police response to the problem has changed; Indian police now take trafficking more seriously. The legal systems have improved. As opposed to four years ago, I think you could make a strong case to upgrade India."

[1](#)4. (SBU) Oasis India representative Ashley Varghese noted, "Coordination between states is better than before. We are also working on border issues with Bangladesh and Nepal. The response from courts is better. There is better victim protection. Even the shelter homes are better. But most of the improvements are because of the GOI. More time needs to be given to tackle the problem."

[1](#)5. (SBU) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Chief of the Child Protection Section Dr. P. M. Nair cautioned, "Things are totally uneven across the country. Who is most immediately affected by the report? Only the top levels of government that want to impress the United States. But, after TIP awareness in India began, the report has made a difference. For example, just look at the recent march across the country to raise awareness of bonded labor. More than just NGOs were involved - law enforcement representatives were there as well. I have already seen a marked difference in the five states where UNODC is working. The multiple Supreme Court rulings help too and sensitivity of the judiciary has increased. Even Panchayats (local government councils) throughout Tamil Nadu have recently set up committees to address the prevention of human trafficking. Andhra Pradesh will soon follow suit."

Not all is Rosy: Where NGOs See Problems

16. (SBU) While there was consensus that the top levels of government and society demonstrated increased awareness, the grassroots level is mired in problems. Swanchetan Director Dr. Rajat Mitra, a clinical psychologist, pointed to the disparity between GOI and grassroots level awareness. "As a psychologist, I am called to police stations late at night. I work at the grassroots level and, at that level, a shake-up is still necessary. I find a number of problems that could have been resolved earlier." Director for the Asian Center for Human Rights Suhas Chakma agreed. "The Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Supreme Court are sensitive to TIP, but the grassroots level is not. The general public is more aware of their rights, though that does not necessarily lead to good enforcement. Furthermore, some groups are much

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more vulnerable than others, especially in the 18 of 28 Indian states that are currently in conflict. Whenever you have displaced people, as a result of conflict or other problems, you will have more vulnerable groups. For example, look at the large number of trafficking victims that come from Assam, a conflict-ridden state." (Note: Other NGOs have previously told Emboffs that trafficking in Assam is directly correlated to low sex-ratios in Punjab and Haryana. Traffickers promise marriages to girls from Assam, Jharkhand and West Bengal which results in both smuggling and internal trafficking of young girls and women.)

17. (SBU) Amod Kanth stated, "Rescue is not the problem. Rehabilitation and reintegration are the biggest problems. The GOI is working on this, forming new schemes. They have been supportive in creating services. But there still needs to be more." President of Shakti Vahini Ravi Kant agreed, noting, "We still need help on rehabilitation efforts."

18. (SBU) Ms. Elizabeth Selhore from Sahara said that, "As a society, we are quite complacent. Why do Shilpa Shetty and Richard Gere make the news for a public kiss, but this incredible problem is not plastered over the front pages? The media needs a shake-up too; they need to be made more aware." Shakti Vahini's Rishi Kant countered that "the media is always writing and going along with raids. There's increased media attention on TIP. But, sadly, Bollywood stars just generate more media buzz than these social issues." Rishi also discussed the Media Coalition established in June 2006 with membership of over 700 journalists throughout the country. The Coalition, which remains very active, aims to sensitize journalists to report on gender issues, share information and act as a pressure group.

19. (SBU) Kanth noted, "We still struggle with porous borders - especially the borders with Bangladesh and Nepal, which are impossible to contain. But Bangladesh and Nepal are equally, if not more, complicit than India on the number of trafficked victims that enter into India." Save the Childhood

Foundation Activist Bhuwan Ribhu added that one of the biggest problems was that "India has no comprehensive TIP policy."

Tier 3 Would Not Help NGOs

¶10. (SBU) The Ambassador asked if a Tier 3 ranking would help shock the system, galvanize the community and, ultimately, help promote their work. President of Shakti Vahini Ravi Kant said, "In 2003 and 2004, (being downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List) was very helpful. The GOI woke up. We started getting help from officials, including the judiciary and law enforcement." Bhuwan Ribhu said "But, this is the first year that there is so much attention to bonded labor. Downgrading won't help. Being on Tier 2 Watch List for four years is enough of a shake-up."

¶11. (SBU) Many NGO leaders also expressed concern about the six month assessment, deeming it insufficient and impractical. Bhuwan said, "The goal is too high. Some progress will be made, but not enough will change in just six months." Ashley Varghese agreed, "Six months is not enough. I would be very unhappy with a downgrade."

¶12. (SBU) UNIFEM Ms. Archana Tamang said, "I'm not disappointed by the report. First, we know there is more to do. And we know that there are not enough prevention efforts. The rescue paradigm has seen a number of sporadic efforts. However, if (your government) threatens to do an inspection in six months, you will see a spike in manufactured raids. Traffickers make nine billion dollars a year; but a similar amount of money is also being put up to stop the problem. Downgrading will not help."

¶13. (SBU) Chakma noted, "Frankly, I don't agree with the system of grading. The point of this report, though, is to make people aware of the problem. Even a few Band-Aid solutions may work because the government is doing something. Honestly, though, there is no quick fix. But short term measures are better than nothing." Ashley countered, "But will this downgrade benefit victims of trafficking? We might end up with a short term solution that no one is happy with."

Comment: TIP Officials Should Visit India

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¶14. (SBU) This year's TIP report has not been lost in the din of India's prolific media (reftel A). The Embassy and consulates have, at all levels, remained engaged with civil society and the GOI. Embassy strongly endorses Foreign Secretary Menon's invitation to senior TIP officials to

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visit India in the near future to discuss the trafficking problem and see the situation for themselves (reftel B).

Appendix: Who's Who in the Room

¶15. (SBU) Attendees included:

-- The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) was represented by UNHCR Chief of Mission Carol Batchelor. While India does not have refugee legislation nor a formal agreement with UNHCR, the organization does work in the country. They carefully and deliberately select appropriate ways to engage with the GOI. Vis-a-vis trafficking, refugees are often amongst the most vulnerable groups to traffickers.

-- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was represented by Dr. P.M. Nair, Chief of the Child Protection Section. UNODC has received over 2.5 million USD from the Government of the United States to launch the largest USG-funded anti-trafficking project in the world. UNODC works with the Ministry of Home Affairs in five states - Maharashtra, Goa, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar - to sensitize law enforcement officials on the importance of arresting traffickers and assisting trafficking victims.

-- The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was represented by UNIFEM Regional Coordinator Ms. Archana Tamang. UNIFEM has partnered with the National Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Institute of Social Sciences and USAID to work on trafficking of women and children. Most recently, UNIFEM partnered with an NGO to set up an anti-trafficking cell in Pune which includes out-reach centers, awareness programs, joint workshops with government agencies, etc. UNIFEM has also been credited with helping the government of Goa draw up an action plan to fight sex tourism.

-- Prayas Institution of Juvenile Justice General Secretary was represented by its founder, General Secretary Mr. Amod Kanth. Prayas, based in Delhi, is one of the largest non-profit organizations in India with centers across seven states serving an estimated 100,000 people. Prayas has developed an impressive network of shelters, drop-in centers and education centers for vulnerable children. It has also led the effort to create a nationwide system of child-help emergency phone lines called "Childline." Prayas has received USG funding and been visited by several high-ranking USG officials, including First Lady Laura Bush, SCA Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher, former Deputy Secretary Richard

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Armitage, and others.

-- Shakti Vahini was represented by their President Mr. Ravi Kant and Mr. Rishi Kant. Shakti Vahini, an NGO based in Haryana, pioneered the concept of government responsibility on TIP issues by publishing its own version of the TIP report. Over 12,000 youth and university students volunteer with Shakti Vahini across India. The youth form a movement by educating rural youth groups to spread information and form "watchdog" groups in surrounding villages. Shakti Vahini has petitioned the Supreme Court to provide rehabilitation to rescued victims of trafficking.

-- Joint Women's Program (JWP) was represented by Regional Coordinator Ms. Lalitha S.A. Nayak. JWP began in 1977 and is dedicated to stopping domestic violence, dowry harassment, rape, and trafficking, and promoting the rights of the girl child. They currently work in 16 states with 19 other NGOs and a staff of nearly 200, including a team of counselors to help women in need. One of their largest projects is the Anti-Trafficking Network which seeks to prevent trafficking, raise awareness, train law enforcement officials, offer counseling and legal services and provide rehabilitation and education.

-- Sahara was represented by Ms. Elizabeth Selhore and Ms. Christine Ramani. For the last 27 years, Sahara has worked with neglected and stigmatized communities, offering services to drug users, commercial sex workers, trafficked persons, transgender, people who are HIV/AIDS positive, etc. Sahara has at least 35 ongoing projects and 200 staff in Delhi, Manipur, Pune and Mumbai.

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-- Save the Childhood Foundation was represented by Mr. Bhuwan Ribhu and Mr. Umesh. Bhuwan leads the movement against trafficking for forced labor through Save the Childhood organization, which focuses specifically on

trafficking of children for forced labor. A lawyer by training, Bhuwan has rescued thousands of children and adults from forced labor. He worked to help the All India Circus Federation gradually phase out recruiting children for circus work, which was the first step toward incorporation of the Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethical Trade practices in the entertainment industry.

-- Swanchetan Society for Mental Health was represented by its Director, Dr. Rajat Mitra. Swanchetan serves victims of trauma and crisis, such as trafficking victims. Swanchetan has a team of seven psychologists and social workers that reach out directly to people when they are most vulnerable. On an average month, Swachetan sees 70-100 patients. They work for all 120 Delhi police stations and help victims provide statements to police. Swanchetan also trains police how to interact with trafficking victims.

-- Oasis India was represented by Mr. Ashley Varghese. Oasis India is part of a global coalition against human trafficking called Stop the Traffick.

-- Catholic Relief Services was represented by Ms. Clodagh McCumiskey. Catholic Relief Services supports local, national and regional anti-trafficking efforts, and has been a recipient of G/TIP funding in the past.

-- The Asian Center for Human Rights (ACHR) was represented by Director Suhas Chakma. ACHR is dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in South Asia by providing information, conducting investigations, increasing the capacity of human rights defenders and providing legal, political and practical advice.

-- The South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center (SAHRDC) was represented by Ms. Rineeta Naik. SAHRDC is a network of individuals across the region that seeks to investigate, document and disseminate information about human rights treaties and conventions, human rights education, refugees, media freedom prison reform, political imprisonment, torture, summary executions, disappears and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

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